



Chantal Spapens
2024

Chantal Spapens, a French/Dutch visual artist, channels her creative expression through performance and sculpture/installation. She is currently pursuing her MFA at the Rome University of Fine Arts (RUFA).

Chantal's artistic narrative unfolds at the intersection of personal experience and societal inquiries, exploring the multifaceted nature of womanhood within the backdrop of a contemporary, capitalist, patriarchal society. Her body of work intricately weaves themes of female agency, body politics, and power relations, delving into the complex layers that define the feminine experience. Through a nuanced lens, Chantal invites viewers to contemplate and engage with the intricate dance between individual stories and broader societal questions in her quest to unravel the essence of womanhood in the contemporary world.

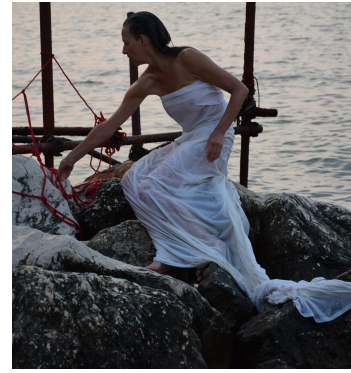
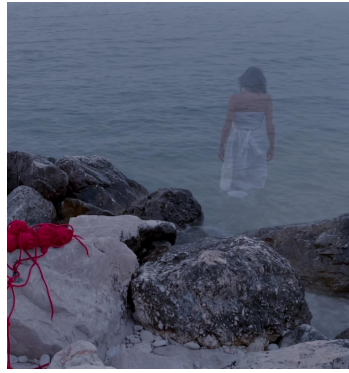




Mare Nostrum

Performance-based video for
Venice Performance Art Week.
2023





Mare Nostrum/20 minute performance-based video [\(link\)](#)

For centuries, the Mediterranean Sea has held a pivotal role in shaping the course of human civilization, serving both as a physical impediment to human mobility and a conduit connecting lands and continents. From the epic journeys of Odysseus navigating its waters to the contemporary reality where it stands as a precarious and tragic space, drawing migrants enticed by the siren song of salvation and sanctuary in Europe—these waters are laden with narratives of both exclusion and inclusion.

The etymology of the word 'siren,' rooted in the Greek words *σειρά* (*seirá*, "rope, cord") and *εἶρω* (*eíró*, "to tie, join, fasten"), unveils its essence as a 'binder' or 'entangler.' In this context, the siren takes center stage, weaving deceptive nets from bloodred ropes on the Mediterranean seashore. The enigmatic aftermath of these knots raises questions: Do they linger to protect or to imprison, offering salvation or paving the path to damnation? Mare Nostrum invites contemplation on the intricate ties between myth, migration, and the haunting allure of the sea.



Wax-Built Castles

Performance at Ombrelloni Art Space, Rome
May 2024.





Wax-Built Castles (Video)

On a continuation of the artist's body of work on the social over-structures conditioning a women's life in society, "Wax-built Castles" is the first performance of a diptych born to state a regained self awareness and agency onto the roles built, with time, around her.

This performance piece acts as a ritual, a first step towards metamorphosis. A physical change that will first melt the skin of everyday domestic life for revealing, tissue after tissue, a cage. The artist, as part of the collectiveness of women, invites you to tear the serene wallpaper of your house and question if the walls behind stand to cage or to protect. Chantal, driven by the works of female feminist artists such as Louis Bourgeois' "Femme Maison" tries to sever the image of the household from the idea of womanhood. And so with Hera's flames, the same flames that burnt at the hearth of centuries, she melts the deceitful flesh revealing the rusty bones of an ever so ancient patriarchy.

Text by Vittorio Venturoli



Small black rectangular label with illegible text.

Garland of Tears

Performance at MAXXI Museo. June 2024.

At the core of this performance are themes of repetition, attention, habit and modelled behaviour. It examines their impact on shaping our identities, bodies, lives and ultimately the world we inhabit. Inviting viewers to reflect on intentional living and contemplate the nature of liberation, freedom and limitation in this framework, as expressed by the oxymoron of the title.





Garland of Tears

Can pleasure be pulled from our painful experiences? Chantal Spapens continues to explore this concept with her durational performance piece “Garland of Tears” at the MAXXI. People raised as women within a western capitalist society experience unspoken expectations to uphold the domestic sphere, including the nurturing of children, who will become future workers of society. Social reproduction, such as this emotional care, largely falls on women in the form of unpaid labor.

Garland of Tears explores the slow, repetitive destruction of the physical body through this lifetime of labor. The silent power of holding the proverbial house up at all costs, all while maintaining a firm grip on the soul. Considering the habits one picks up in the process that will ultimately shape their destiny within a system that predetermines identity before exiting the womb.

Chantal becomes a sort of religious idol in this performance: meditating over her slow building garland, accepting no interactions and no rest. She is closing a chapter in her life surrounding grief and subordination, moving towards self liberation. Allowing herself the time to process her decisions, a luxury literally not afforded to any body under capitalism. There is a question arising in this process of building: can we all move from a place of self flagellation, inflicting pain as a measure of self fulfillment, can we queer the narrative and be brave enough to structure new visions?

Text by Victoria Froberg

Devastate me, Baby
Performance-based video.
2023





Devastate Me, Baby/performance-based video [\(link\)](#)

Created during the residency at Chateau d'Orquevaux in France, this video is inspired by Baudelaire's masterpiece « Les fleurs du mal », a collection of 'cursed poetry', encapsulating the French Decadent movement..

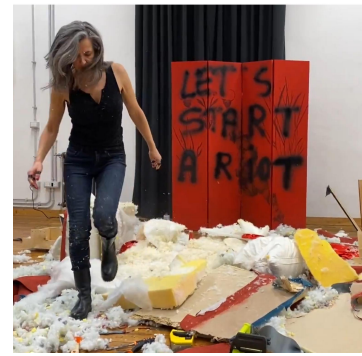
Decadence, in the context of womanhood and feminism, holds relevance in its essence of refusal—an opposition to the norm. This manifests as a rejection of art historical ideologies (such as the use of craft), gendered norms, traditional feminine roles, and discourse around excessive consumption of food, alcohol, and drugs. Chantal purposefully embrace this 'excess' as a deliberate and liberating aesthetic, contemplating the obsessive, violent and addictive nature of desire.

In conclusion, decadence is far from obsolete; we live in undeniably ultra-decadent times. The performance navigates and challenges these decadent complexities, offering a contemplative lens on the refusal of societal norms and the liberation found in embracing excess.

A Room of One's Own

Performance for RUFA Performance Cluster.
2023





A Room of One's Own (video)

Chantal's radical act of dismantling the all-red living room serves as a powerful visual metaphor for reclaiming female agency within domestic and societal structures, echoing Virginia Woolf's call for autonomy.

The destruction, from personal tools to a chainsaw, symbolizes the intensity required to visibly assert women's presence and challenge societal norms that often marginalize them. The act is a bold statement, emphasizing the need for women to disrupt traditional spaces and assert their right to exist and take up space in a way that challenges conventional expectations.

Transfiguration / When Mary lost her Grace
Performance for "Performing Rome".
2023





Transfiguration/ When Mary lost her grace ([link](#))

Transfiguration, a revelation of true nature or form. This performance piece, focuses on the deceitful archetypes of motherhood. In a brilliant transfiguration of the Mary with her child, a symbol of maternal grace, Chantal demystifies the sacred images passed down by centuries of painting tradition. So she sits, statury in the center of an arch, with two baby sized cans of milk, struggling to keep them on her laps while they slowly reverse on her the milk they've been fed. Chantal personification of the Mary has little to do, besides the iconographical context she is placed in, with a Madonna from Bellini: while Chantal's virgin sweats, gasps, shakes pained by the weight of responsibility, the second hides behind a mask of virtuosity, gracefully empty. Her white dress, deceitfully pure, will progressively wetten, revealing the flawed skin laying underneath, the true shades of desires behind the veil of maternal duties.

She knows the weight will grow lighter as the children will grow less and less dependent on her, and so she waits, patiently, restlessly picking them up if fallen, lulling their fears away, for a time where her milk will no longer be needed. The performance culminates with the emptying of the last milk, showering the Mary, marking a time of rebirth and new beginning. The milk, with which the dress of the Mary is soaked, transfigured her, revealing a part of herself for too long kept dormant.

The Mary is reborn.

Text by Vittorio Venturoli



Is your Blood as Red as this
Performance at RUFA Space -
Pastificio Cerere
2024





Is your Blood as Red as this [\(Video\)](#)

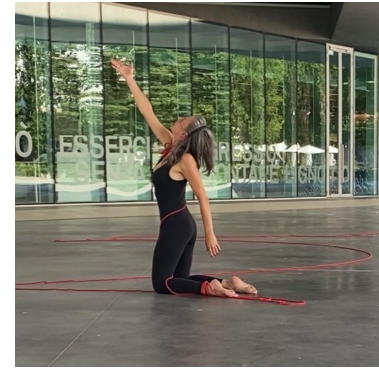
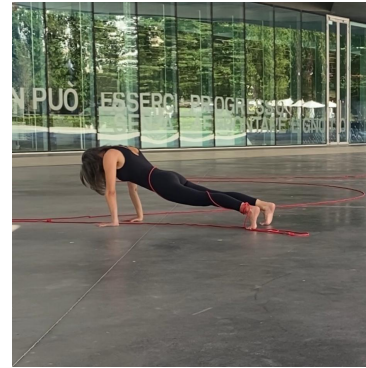
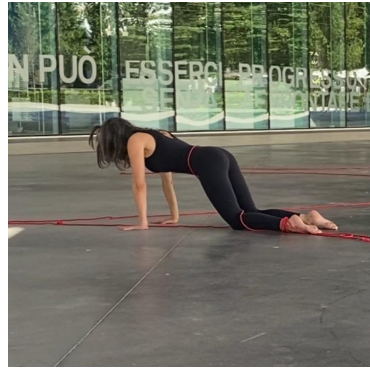
Pomegranates, laden with ancient symbolism, carry the weight of fertility, primal desire, and sacred union. Whispers of its forbidden essence echo through time, from Eden's whispered temptations to the depths of Greek and Roman mythology, where it embodies the promise of renewal and eternal life. In this performance, Chantal embarks on a visceral journey, exploring the tangled web of desire—a ritualistic homage to its intoxicating allure.

With bare hands, Chantal unlock the secrets held within the pomegranates, releasing a torrent of seeds, each a testament to the primal dance of creation and consumption. With hands and body, she extracts the lifeblood within, its scarlet essence flowing freely into waiting vessels. Lips meet vessel in an intimate communion, as she partakes of its essence—a consummation of flesh and fruit, desire and devotion.

The scene, frozen in time, serves as a silent witness to the ephemeral nature of longing—a haunting reminder of passion's transient embrace, inviting viewers to linger, reflect, and journey into the depths of their own desires.

L'après-midi d'une Nymphe
Performance at MAXXI Museo.
2023.





L'après-midi d'une Nymphé [\(link\)](#)

Drawing inspiration from Mallarmé's poetry and Nijinsky's ballet, 'l'après-midi d'un Faune', this performance shifts focus to the feminine nymph, a fleeting mythological being embodying masculine fantasy. Departing from the original, where nymphs exist solely to support masculine desire, our rendition places the nymph at the forefront.

Tensions arise as Chantal navigates between postures meant to please herself and those designed for the male gaze. Guided by the red cord of passion, she embarks on a journey towards self-fulfillment, discovering her own pleasure and satisfaction.

After « La Velata »

Performance at Castello Caraciollo, Sammichele di Bari.
2023.





After 'La Velata' [\(link\)](#)

This performance draws inspiration from Antonio Corradini's sculpture 'La Vestale Tuccia (La Velata),' crafted around 1752 and currently exhibited at Palazzo Barberini in Rome. Depicting the vestal holding a sieve, the statue tells the tale of her needing to demonstrate her adherence to the vow of chastity by carrying water from the Tiber River in a sieve without spilling it.

In this rendition, two buckets filled with red wine stand in opposition. Cloaked in white, the Vestal Virgin endeavors to transport red wine between the buckets using her bare hands. Despite her efforts, she struggles to avoid spilling any, resulting in her eventual immersion in the spilled wine.

The core theme of this performance delves into the unattainable and absurd standards imposed upon women, the contradictory and sometimes demeaning roles they are expected to fulfill, and the concealed labor necessary for them to be considered successful or acceptable in a patriarchal society. It underscores the rigged nature of the task, illustrating that women, under such circumstances, face an impossible challenge with no chance of success.

Mother-Tongue

Performance at RUFA Space - Pastificio
Cerere. March 2024.





Mother-Tongue (Video)

“Mother Tongue” is a work, aesthetically pure in its simplicity, that aims to inspire positive motion in a society profoundly lacking unity.

The performance unfolds with the artist in the role of the mother, assuming an initial pose reminiscent of *La Pietà* by Michelangelo, embodying grief and mourning for the loss of togetherness. With her body arched in sorrow, she cradles in her arms the weight of the shattered fragments of the once magnificent tower of Babel, which once held all of humanity’s knowledge under a great forgotten language.

As the performance progresses, the Mother of Tongues—she who speaks all the languages—tirelessly tries to reconstruct the scattered pieces of a lost civilization. Despite having witnessed the fall many times before and knowing its inevitable failure, she persists in her devotion to gathering lost words from the audience’s tongues. The performance stands as a hymn to the perseverance of nurture, to build and share sweet words of reconciliation. As she invites you to take part in this unifying act, accept her plea and surrender your words, let them float willingly from your lips, carried by the sweet intention of the Mother Tongue.

Text by Vittorio Venturoli

In the Name of Love
Performance at RUFA Atelier.
2023.





In the Name of Love ([link](#))

“Tear the fabric of submission to pieces”

Nadia Tolokonnikova, A Pussy Riot Guide to activism

Chantal's compelling performance challenges the conventional narrative of love as a male construct, rooted in obsessive surveillance of the female body. Liberating herself from a harness of pink ribbons, she confronts contemporary notions of romantic love. By meticulously dissecting a life-sized teddy bear, the act questions the inherent possessiveness and violence often associated with love.

The fearless culmination, with Chantal dismantling the teddy bear and emptying it of its stuffing, serves as a powerful metaphor for the urgent need to reinvent love. This thought-provoking performance invites viewers to reconsider societal norms surrounding love, pushing boundaries to prompt reflection on how we can reshape and redefine this complex emotion.



The Places I go in my Head
200 x 50 x 50 cm
Paracord, thread, iron wire. 2023





ECSTATIC EXTINCTION

*« Allow me to introduce you to the gang:
Snowball, Molly, Dolce, Gabbana, Crystal, Adam, Ed and Superman.*

*They like to party like it's 1999
or, as the great contemporary philosopher Katy Perry would say:
"Pictures of last night
Ended up online
WE - ARE - SCREWED"*

ECSTATIC EXTINCTION

Interactive Installation 100x120cm & Single Channel Video ([Video](#))
Foil balloons, spray paint on canvas, disco lights. 2023





Ecstatic Extinction ([Video](#))

The inspirations for this piece were the book 'Amusing ourselves to death' written by Neil Postman, and my own behavior, online and with regards to the daily news. The book, written in 1985, is about the danger of journalism, politics and religion becoming forms of entertainment. Indeed, we notice today the difficulty to elevate the debate and truly mobilize the public on urgent issues surrounding for example climate change. Even on the verge of extinction, we will be losing ourselves constantly, ecstatically, in something more exciting, scandalous, entertaining to pay attention to. Willingly giving up ever more privacy for our next shot of dopamine, on the same screen, or at the next click.

The final work consist of a 43 second video and an interactive 3D painting of 100x120cm.





Theater of Desire (I wanted you to Stay)

250 x 200 x 30 cm

Cotton sheets, thread, satin ribbon, iron. 2023

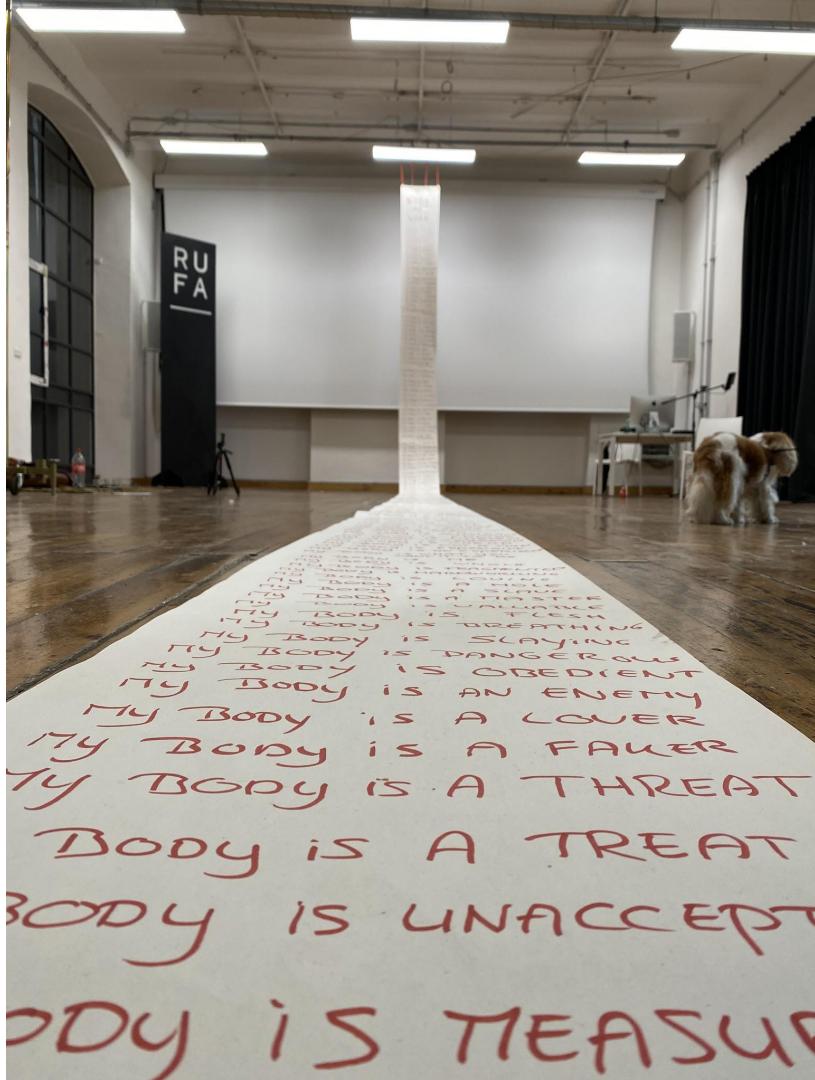


Panta Rei ([Link to Video](#))
Site-Specific Installation & Video 32 sec.
Leaves, thread. 2023



BODY
OF
WORK

My Body is a TOOL
My Body is FREEDOM
My Body is a PRISON
My Body is LIFE
My Body is DEATH
My Body is STRONG
My Body is HEALTHY
My Body is SICK
My Body is WEAK
My Body is a HOTTER
My Body is POWER
My Body is an ARMOR
My Body is VULNERABLE
My Body is a MACHINE
My Body is WORK
My Body is NATURAL
My Body is ARTIFICIAL
My Body is AGING
My Body is GETTING
STRONGER
My Body is UGLY
My Body is HURTING
My Body is COLD
My Body is A WEAPON
My Body is PLEASURE
My Body is A WHORE
My Body is NOT PERFECT
My Body is PAIN
My Body is DYING
My Body is EPHEMERAL
My Body is TO BE
CONTROLLED
My Body is A DANGER
My Body is BETRAYAL
My Body is EVIL
My Body is NORMAL
My Body is HAIRY
My Body is HUNGRY
My Body is HONEST
My Body is JUDGED
My Body is SPIRITUAL
My Body is A MESS
My Body is ADDICTED
My Body is SEXY
My Body is NOT ENOUGH
My Body is TOO MUCH
My Body is NOT FOR

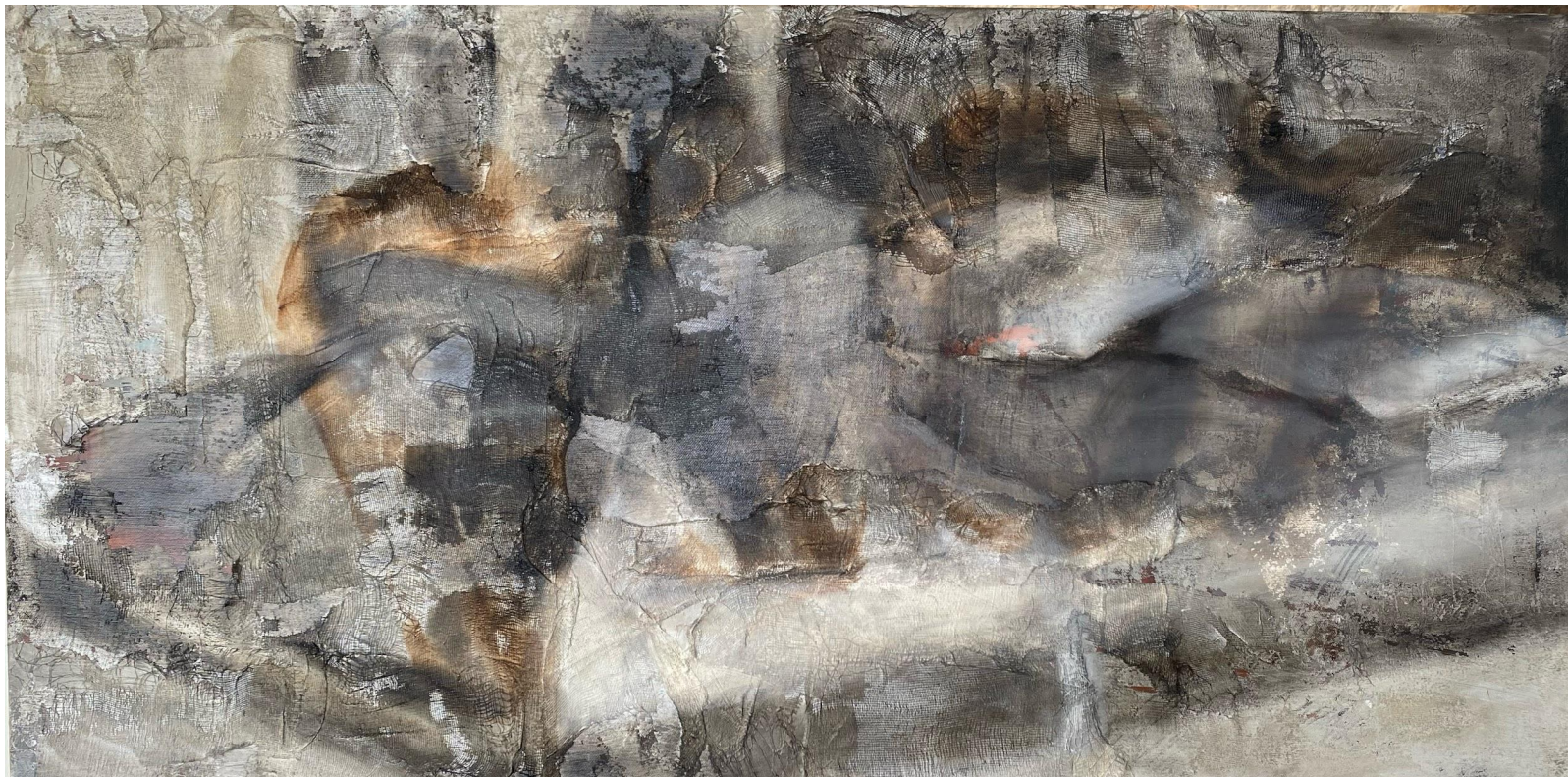


My Body is a THING
My Body is PUNISHABLE
My Body is SMELLY
My Body is UGLY
My Body is SWEATY
My Body is MENOPAUSAL
My Body is OUT OF CONTROL
My Body is A SUCCESS
My Body is A FAILURE
My Body is A possibility
My Body is EASY
My Body is SEXY
My Body is TOUGH
My Body is THIRSTY
My Body is A BITCH
My Body is SWEET
My Body is A FIGHTER
My Body is A LOSER
My Body is LOVE
My Body is HATE
My Body is SENSITIVE
My Body is NERVOUS
My Body is RELAXED
My Body is GROWING
My Body is UNIQUE
My Body is EXCITING
My Body is DULL
My Body is NOTHING
SPECIAL
My Body is DEFEATED
My Body is ORDINARY
My Body is A WONDERLAND
My Body is A NIGHTMARE
My Body is ON FIRE

Body of Work (Video)
Installation
Paper, sharpie. 2023

Something I can Feel
Oil on canvas
100x100 cm. 2022





A burning desire to return to white

Oil on canvas

60 x 100 cm. 2023

Performances and screenings

2024

- "Is your Blood as Red as this". "Peek Me", a duo exhibition. RUFA Space - Pastificio Cerere, Rome. January 2024.
- "Devastate Me, Baby", performance-based video part of VR Exhibition "The Poetic Image". Curated by VestAndPage and Anja Foerschner. Online.
- "Mother-Tongue". Performance Cluster. Curated by Vittorio Venturoli. RUFA Space - pastificio Cerere, Rome. March 2024.
- "Wax-Built Castles". Ombrelloni Art Space, San Lorenzo, Rome. Curated by Vittorio Venturoli & Victoria Froberg. May 2024.
- "Garland of Tears". MAXXI, Museo Nazionale delle arti del IXX secolo, Rome. Curated by Fabrizio Pizzuto. June 2024.

2023

- "Mare Nostrum", performance-based video screened at Venice International Performance Art Biennale. Curated by Anja Foerschner. Venice, December 2023.
- "After La Velata", AXIA exhibition. Curated by RetroGuard. Sammichele di Bari, September 2023.
- "L'après-midi d'une Nymphé", MAXXI, Museo Nazionale delle arti del IXX secolo, Rome. Curated by Marta Jovanovic. Rome, July 2023.
- "A Room of One's Own", Performance Cluster. Curated by Marta Jovanovic. RUFA Space, Rome, February 2023.

Exhibitions

2024

- "Peek Me" duo exhibition. RUFA Space - Pastificio Cerere. Curated by Fabrizio Pizzuto. Rome.

2023

- "Libere...di vivere". Group Exhibition. Borgo Pio Gallery. Curated by Giovanna Canu. Rome.

Art Residencies

2023

- ECC Performance Art DiGiLabAir. Co-funded by the European Union.
- Chateau d'Orquevaux, Orquevaux, France. Received the Denis Diderot Grant.

Art Internships & Professional Experience

- Communication & Project Management at ECC Performance Art. ECC Performance Art is an online teaching and research platform dedicated to Performance Art. January - June 2024.
- Academic Tutor for the course « Performing Rome », RUFA Performance Art Summer Academy. Rome, July 2024.

Chantal Spapens
+39 3343730732
Chantal.spapens@gmail.com
[@chantalspapens](#)

